

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

The claims are amended as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a reservation control system for reserving items dispensed by vending machines networked to the reservation control system, comprising:  
receiving, from a requesting computer, a reservation request for an item;  
determining whether the item is available at a vending machine; and  
if the item is available, reserving the item to ensure availability of the item at the vending machine in satisfaction of the reservation request, wherein reserving the item comprises placing a hold on the item at the vending machine to prevent the item from being purchased by any person other than a person for whom the reservation request is made.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising, if the item is available, transmitting a message indicating that the reservation request has been accepted, whereby the item is reserved for a future pickup.
3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the reservation control system is a receiving vending machine.
4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the requesting computer is a requesting vending machine.
5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a reservation request comprises receiving an item identifier and an item location identifier.
6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the reservation request is received from a wireless telephone.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the vending machine is connected to a network of vending machines.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether the item is available at the vending machine comprises accessing a product data structure containing a value indicative of a number of the item available at the vending machine, wherein the data structure is periodically updated with information received from the vending machine.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising, if the item is unavailable, transmitting a message indicating that the reservation request has been rejected.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising, upon determining that the item has been purchased from the vending machine, removing an associated reservation request record from a reservation data structure.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein reserving the item the item comprises assigning a confirmation number to the reservation request, wherein the confirmation number is used to retrieve the item from the vending machine at future time.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, further comprising, if the item is available, transmitting to the requesting computer a message containing the confirmation number.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein reserving the item the item comprises storing an item identifier and a vending machine location identifier and assigning a confirmation number to the reservation request.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, further comprising, if the item is available, transmitting a message containing the confirmation number.

16. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising receiving an electronic input indicative of a selection to retrieve the item at the vending machine.

17-19. (Cancelled)

20. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
calculating a service charge for the item according to a length of time for which  
the item was reserved; and  
charging the service charge to a purchaser of the item.

21. (Original) The method of claim 20, wherein the service charge increases with  
an increasing reservation time.

22. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
receiving a request at the vending machine to dispense the item; and  
calculating a service charge for the item according to a length of time for which  
the item was reserved.

23. (Original) The method of claim 22, wherein the service charge increases with  
an increasing reservation time.

24. (Original) The method of claim 23, charging the service charge to a purchaser  
of the item.

25. (Currently Amended) A reservation system for reserving items dispensed  
by vending machines, comprising:  
a memory containing a reservation program;

a first network interface to support a first network connection with a client computer issuing a reservation request for a vending machine item;  
a second network interface to support a second network connection with at least one vending machine; and

a processor which, when configured by the reservation program, determines an availability of the vending machine item at the at least one vending machine and, if the vending machine item is available, reserves the item to ensure availability of the item in satisfaction of the reservation request, wherein reserving the item comprises placing a hold on the item to prevent the item from being purchased by any person other than a person for whom the reservation request is made.

26. (Original) The reservation system of claim 25, wherein the first network interface and the second network interface are the same.

27. (Original) The reservation system of claim 25, wherein the processor is further configured to issue a confirmation number to the client computer if the item is available.

28. (Original) The reservation system of claim 25, wherein the processor determines the availability of the vending machine item by accessing a reservation data structure contained in the memory and wherein the reservation data structure is periodically updated with information received from the vending machine.

29. (Original) The reservation system of claim 25, wherein the reservation system is a vending machine.

30-41. (Cancelled)

Please add the following new claim:

42. (New) A method of operating a reservation control system for reserving items dispensed by vending machines networked to the reservation control system, comprising:

receiving, from a requesting computer, a reservation request for an item;  
determining whether the item is available at a first vending machine;

if the item is available at the first vending machine, reserving the item to ensure availability of the item in satisfaction of the reservation request, wherein reserving the item comprises placing a hold on the item to prevent the item from being purchased by any person other than a person for whom the reservation request is made;

receiving a request input to a second vending machine to dispense the item, wherein the second vending machine is different from the first vending machine; and

if the item is available at the second vending machine, issuing an instruction to dispense the item from the second vending machine and updating a data structure to indicate that the item has been dispensed.